

IntegratedEthics™ (IE) Journal Activity

Leader Guide

[Psychology of Fraud: Why Good People Do Bad Things](#), by
Chana Joffe-Walt and Alix Spiegel

Joffe-Walt, Chana and Spiegel, Alix. 2012. *NPR* (May, 2012). www.npr.org

Overview

This journal activity provides a venue for reflection, discussion, and inquiry about the concept of “cognitive frames” and the effect certain frames have on ethical problems. While reading and/or listening to “[Psychology of Fraud: Why Good People Do Bad Things](#),” by Chana Joffe-Walt and Alix Spiegel, you should consider the types of decisions you face within VHA and the cognitive frames through which you consider these decisions. At the journal meeting, those questions will be used as the basis for collegial discussion about your experience with the ethical environment and culture in your facility.

Objectives for the IE Journal Activity Meeting

- Learn about the concept of “cognitive frames” and how they apply to ethical thinking.
- Reflect on the cognitive frames through which decisions are made.
- Discuss situations in which empathy and a desire to help people you identify with may inhibit your ability to make decisions through an ethical frame.
- Engage in collaborative discussion with colleagues about the ethical environment and culture in your facility.
- Brainstorm organizational solutions to support using an ethical frame for decision making.

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Logistics

Participants

Journal Discussions are open to any staff members who wish to participate.

Preparation for the Journal Discussion

At least two weeks before the meeting:

1. Announce the event, and make sure everyone in the facility is aware of it. This may be accomplished by email, posters, or with news and announcements. Consider scheduling the discussion more than once to allow staff on different schedules (e.g. swing shift, etc.) to attend.
2. Reserve a meeting space with a computer, speakers, and a projector. Reserve a whiteboard or flipchart easel if you want to capture participants' ideas and encourage brainstorming.

At least one week before the meeting:

Send an email to facility staff with an attached Participant Guide and a link to the online audio/article: <http://www.npr.org/2012/05/01/151764534/psychology-of-fraud-why-good-people-do-bad-things>

A day or two before the meeting:

1. Confirm the journal event in another announcement, and remind participants to bring their Participant Handouts with them.
2. Make extra copies of the participant handouts and bring to the meeting.

At the meeting:

Depending on time available, begin the meeting either by playing the audio (20min) or projecting the text-and-graphics story from the NPR website (10 min).

After the meeting:

Summarize notes generated during brainstorming and share them with participants. You may also choose to include a summary in a brief write-up that can be included in a facility article, local newsletter, or daily report. A brief summary can help participants who were unable to join the discussion learn about the activity and encourage them to participate in future IE events. If ideas are generated that might be considered for implementation across the facility, the IE Council could be briefed for consideration.

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Role of the Journal Discussion Leader

The leader is responsible for getting the meeting started and setting the tone. Discussion should be open, collegial, and relevant to the five journal activity objectives. Consider having a member of the facility leadership team, if available, lead this journal discussion to demonstrate to staff that ethics is a priority.

It is not necessary to cover all the key questions during the meeting. The leader should try to ensure, however, that all participants get the opportunity to share their thoughts on questions that particularly matter to them or have particular relevance to the facility.

Who Speaks When?

Typically, a discussion among a group of six or fewer participants, seated around a table or in a circle, is self-facilitating. However, the leader may need to intervene from time to time if one person is dominating the discussion or if the discussion goes off track. In those instances, the leader may say, “Let’s hear from someone else on this,” or “Let’s go back to the question.”

In a larger group, it may be helpful to have participants raise their hands when they want to speak. This can be decided after the discussion starts. If one or more people dominate, or people are talking at once, the leader may intervene and suggest to the group, “Maybe we should use hands to signal who wants to speak?” If it is difficult for the leader to keep track of whose turn it is to speak, the leader or another person in the room can jot down the order in which hands go up.

Timing

The time allotted for discussion of each question depends on how long the session will last, generally about 30 minutes.

The leader should start the meeting promptly, and should announce in the beginning how much time will be spent on each question. The leader is responsible for moving the discussion from one question to the next, when the allotted time is up.

If the leader isn’t sure s/he can track the time, s/he may ask for a volunteer timekeeper from the participant group.

Questions about IE Program

When a need for more information about the IE program at the facility comes up in discussion, the discussion leader may call on the IE program staff in the room for a brief response. However, the journal activity is not meant to turn into a Q&A session. If a brief response isn’t feasible, the discussion leader should ask the IE program staff to make a note of the question and respond to it later.

Leading the Journal Discussion

1. Introduce the session (5 min.)

Set Expectations

Welcome participants. If you are not known to the group, introduce yourself by name and ask others to do the same. (IE program staff should quickly explain their IE role when introducing themselves.)

Direct participants to the meeting objectives on the first page of their handout and quickly read through them.

Explain your role as the leader in a Journal Discussion. You are responsible for:

- Facilitating an open, collegial and relevant discussion.
- Ensuring that all participants who want to join in the discussion get an opportunity to do so.
- Keeping the discussion on track.
- Encouraging participants to seek information about the IE program at their facilities, and to follow up on ethics concerns shared during the discussion.

2. Scroll through web story (10 min.)

Or play audio (20 min.)

3. Discuss key questions (30 min.)

For each key question there are two sub-bullet questions (6 total questions):

1. Read the initial statement.

Ask: “Does anyone have a clarifying question about this statement?” Take no more than a minute to clarify any terms, facts, or references in the statement.

2. Read the first question bullet. Allow participants a little time to gather their thoughts, and then look around the room to see who is ready to address the question.

Invite that person (or the whole group if no one volunteers) to start the discussion. (If two or more people look ready to speak, choose one and let the other(s) know they’re in line: “Go ahead, Jane. Marcus, you’re next, then Latoya.”)

3. When about half the time allotted to the first bulleted question is up, or when the discussion seems to flag, suggest to the group, “Let’s look at the second part of this question,” and read the second bullet.

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If necessary, prompt the group to re-start discussion. Ask, “Any thoughts about _____?” [Choose one or two key words from the question.]

4. When the time for the question runs out, get the group’s attention and say something like, “I’m afraid we’re out of time on this question. Any last thoughts on it?”

3. Conclude the session

(5 min.)

When there are only five minutes left, inform participants that the time is almost up.

If anyone objects that s/he hasn’t had a chance to express an idea or concern about the practice of ethics at the facility, ask the group if they agree to let that person speak for a minute or two. (People will usually agree, if the facilitator has shown an ability to keep to the allotted time so far.)

Follow-up on Questions, Comments, Suggestions

If participants have made suggestions about improving ethical practice at the facility, read out the suggestions.

Close

Thank participants for a good discussion (and good suggestions, if any). As applicable inform the participants that you will include a summary of the discussion and ideas generated in a brief write-up that can be included in a facility article in a local newsletter or daily report. In addition, if ideas are generated that might be considered for implementation across the facility; the IE Council could be briefed for consideration.

Key Questions

Question 1: “Why We Don’t See The Ethical Big Picture”

In the story, Ann Tenbrunsel, a researcher from Notre Dame who studies unethical behavior, says that “certain cognitive frames make us blind to the fact that we are confronting an ethical problem at all.” According to Tenbrunsel, “the business frame cognitively activates one set of goals—to be competent, to be successful; the ethics frame triggers other goals—to be fair and not hurt others.”

- Through what types of frames might decisions at your facility be made?
- Have you ever experienced a situation in which you believe someone was making a decision through a business frame rather than an ethical frame? How might the framing in this situation have changed the outcome?

Note to discussion leader: Question one is really intended to get people thinking about how they frame decisions and what factors they consider when making decisions at work. If no one is eager to answer feel free to share an example from Toby’s case in the article. After Toby realized his company was failing, his main concern was to fix it. He believed that by taking out another mortgage on his personal property he could temporarily cover the quarter of a million dollars of shortfall for his business; however, in order to get the second mortgage, he would need to lie. Toby says, “You know, things are going to happen, and I just needed to do whatever I needed to do to fix that.” According to Ann Tenbrunsel, “His sole focus was on making the best business decision, which made him blind to the ethics.” (p. 2 – 5) In Toby’s case, had he been using an ethical frame, his mental checklist would have been different and he may not have told that first lie to begin with.

Question 2: “We Lie Because We Care”

Chapter 5 of the print transcript begins by noting the common assumption that people commit fraud because they have a financial incentive to do so. Some psychologists and economists, however, are interested in another possible explanation: we commit fraud because we *like* each other. “We like to help each other, especially people we identify with. And when we are helping people, we really don’t see what we are doing as unethical.” In Toby’s story, his staff and professional colleagues faced a decision in which “future abstract consequences” competed with helping “the very real person in front of them.”

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- Can you think of a situation in which empathy or a desire to help someone you identify with may inhibit your ability to make decisions through an ethical frame?
- Have you ever been in a position where you had to weigh abstract future consequences against helping someone who was right there in front of you? What were the consequences?

Note to discussion leader: This question focuses on how we might potentially aid and abet unethical behavior—shifting the emphasis from Toby to those who covered for him. Get people to think of situations they know of, or might imagine, in which they might permit unethical actions to occur out of seemingly benevolent motivations: caring and empathy. Or out of passivity—simply not taking action.

Question 3: Solutions

At the conclusion of this article, the authors say, “If we are all capable of behaving profoundly unethically without realizing it, then our workplaces and regulations are poorly organized...They don’t attempt to structure things around our weaknesses.” In the printed transcript, they end with two concrete proposals to support ethical framing (the audio version includes only the first proposal): 1) force businesses to change auditors every couple of years to eliminate the possibility of business-auditor relationships that can corrupt audits, and 2) place a sentence at the beginning of business contracts which explicitly states that lying on the contract is unethical and illegal.

- Can you think of anything your setting/service line/facility could do locally to support using an ethical frame for decision making?
- How about the larger organization, such as in this facility or across our region?

Note to discussion leader: Capture participants’ ideas on a whiteboard or flipchart paper if available, or you may choose to simply write down the ideas generated by the group. If ideas are generated that might be considered for implementation across the facility, the IE Council could be briefed for consideration. Involving the IE Council as necessary may be a great way to promote ethics and enhance the ethical environment and culture within your facility.